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ABSTRACT

Students in an honors section of a basic public speaking course asked for a final examination which was not multiple choice. Taught from a multicultural perspective, the course emphasized dialogue, excitement, and democratic principles, as well as issues regarding group differences and how power relations function to structure racial and ethnic identities. It was decided that the "final examination" would be in the form of a group discussion on a specific topic. All students would agree on a topic that they wanted to discuss for 2 hours. They would then research the topic and prepare some remarks that reflected their opinions. They would have about 2 weeks between the time they agreed on the topic and the examination. They would be graded on how well they (1) offered new information; (2) gave evidence of their opinions; (3) cited their sources; and (4) maintained eye contact with the entire class. At the exam, the students sat in a semi-circle, while the instructor stood in front with an overhead form with each person's name followed by the 4 grading criteria--the students, in other words, could see the grading as the discussion progressed. The examination discussion was a success in that it engaged all students and represented a diverse range of opinions. There were some problems, however. It is questionable as to whether the exam constituted a discussion as opposed to a round-robin speech forum in which each student grabbed his or her chance to say their piece. Also, the public grading distracted the students. (Grading chart is attached.) (TB)

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A MULTI-CULTURAL FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THE PUBLIC SPEAKING COURSE

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This final examination emerged from an honors section of "Fundamentals of Public Speaking". The students were very articulate, enjoyed debate, and objected to a multiple-choice final examination. They had taken a multiple-choice mid-term examination and felt the same kind of test for the final would be redundant and boring. I quickly agreed with them and soon afterward, developed an alternative final examination. I believe it to be a truer indicator of the students' speaking skills than are multiple choice examinations. This paper describes what I believe to be some fundamental principles of multi-cultural education, the final examination, and how this exam fulfills those principles. I will also discuss the success of the examination and what might be improved.

Principles of multi-cultural pedagogy

As I understand it, multi-cultural pedagogy (at least at the college level) consists of distinct processes, as compared to traditional pedagogy, as well as some specific content or areas of exploration. First, the multi-cultural classroom should be a place where there is dialogue, exitement, and some measure of democratic participation. "[C]ritical pedagogy needs to address the problem of bringing together various political and theoretical constituencies and their social or cultural differences" (Kanpol and McLaren, 1995, p. 5), in the classroom "where there is a collective reinterpretation of our lived world" (Shapiro, 1991, p. 114). Hooks (1994) states that "the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring" (p.

7), where "everyone feels a responsibility to contribute" (p. 39). Giroux (1995) agrees that multi-cultural education ""puts people in dialogue with each other as part of a broader attempt to fashion a renewed interest in cultural democracy andd the creation of engaged and critical citizens" (p. 116).

Second, there are certain areas for discussion that many multi-cultural pedagogical scholars agree are central for the classroom. Some of these areas include addressing "issues regarding group differences and how power relations function to structure racial and ethnic identities" (Giroux, 1995, pl. 118). According to Grants and Sachs (1995), multi-cultural education "provide[s] students with the knowledge and skills to enable them to give a definitive account of how 'culture' is acquired, transmitted and distributed...." (p. 100). Grant and Sachs (1995) also believe that students should gain a greater understanding of their selves in relation to the multiple identities (i.e. race, gender, class) used to define them (p. 94).

Perhaps most importantly, a multi-cultural, critical pedagogy gives students the opportunity, along with their teachers, to critique educational policy and practice (Kanpol and McLaren, 1995). Note that this last criterion combines the previous two characteristics of multi-culturalism by requiring <u>dialogue</u> regarding a particular <u>content</u>, their own education.

So, we have a picture of a classroom that is engaged in lively discussion where everyone's voice is heard, and where the students are actively listening to one another. This discussion may center around societal power differentials, cultural issues, or the

condition of living within multiple identities. Furthermore, the students are critiquing their educational experience as it is occurring.

Description of the Examination

I initially prepared the students by explaining the final examination. It required that the students agree on a topic which they would all want to discuss for two hours. They would then research the topic and prepare some remarks which reflected their opinion. They would have about two weeks between the time that they agreed on the topic and the examination. They would be graded according to how well they accomplished four tasks: 1) offering new/useful information: 2) giving evidence for their opinion; 3) citing their source(s); and 4) maintaining eye contact with the entire class. I also gave guidelines regarding acceptable and non-acceptable sources. I encouraged positions from the "left" and "right" as articulated by accessible, relatively intellectual sources (i.e. The Nation, Chronicle of Higher Education, New York Times, Ms. etc.)

The class session after I explained the examination, the students came with a list of topics they would be willing to discuss. We spent about one-half hour narrowing the list, trying to choose a topic which most of the class was interested in. In the end, they chose two topics to discuss. One was a topic I came up with in case they couldn't decide--"multi-culturalism in higher education." The other was "global trade."

We also planned the process of the discussion. I told the students that they were responsible for managing the class, that I was not going to call on people. Rather, my energy would be focused on evaluating their comments, and keeping track of them on an overhead. They decided that I should bring some kind of ball which they could pass around to indicate a speaker's (uninterrupted) turn. I stipulated that as soon as the students received a satisfactory grade (to them), they were then required to help others receive their grades by asking questions and showing interest.

At the appointed examination time, the students sat in a semi-circle; I stood at the opening of it with the overhead which had everyone's name followed by the four grading criteria. The students, therefore, could see my grading as the discussion progressed.

Evaluation of the Examination

The examination successfully put into practice many of the multi-cultural principles stated above. There was a lively discussion which focused on ethnic identity and power differentials, and required them to be critical of their education; everyone had a chance to talk, and hence, there was a relatively diverse range of opinions expressed; further, the intent of the examination was to place the students in dialogue and to listen to one another. Finally, it was executed in a fairly democratic manner by allowing the students to choose the next speaker, and by exposing the grading process so the students could make adjustments in their behavior in order to receive their intended grade.

The examination may also be deemed successful by the success of the students. They did very well on this test, seemed to enjoy it, shared fairly sophisticated information, and I believe it helped them build their skills. One student who could not bring himself to look at the audience during the entire semester finally looked at his classmates during this examination, aided by the students' (non-verbal) encouragement.

However, there were also problems with this examination structure. First, it was questionable how much the examination was actually a discussion. Rather, the students grabbed their chance to speak, said what they had planned to, and didn't seem to be actually responding to one another's comments. That is, the examination didn't require them to be listening closely to one another as I had planned. Perhaps because of this, they became bored of the first topic (multi-culturalism in education) and then changed to the other (global trade). Fortunately, we had prepared for this contingency; however, I think if they had truly been listening to one another, they would not have become bored with the first topic. In addition, there was not as much diversity in opinion expressed as I had hoped, a condition which no doubt also related to the students' becoming bored with the topic; all of the students were basically opposed to their perception of a multi-cultural education.

Finally, it may be a problem that they all received an "A" for the final examination. This was an honors class so it might be explained by the fact that they were highly motivated students. On the other hand, it might be that the examination was not an adequate

indicator of their speaking skills. There was a differentiation among skills in the class, yet this did not appear on the examination.

Future changes: I will be giving this examination again this semester with a few changes. Along with the current grading criteria "offering new/useful information," "giving evidence for their opinion." "citing their source(s)," and "maintaining eye contact with the entire class," I am going to add three more: 1) used a transition from previous speakers; 2) expressed one clear point; and 3) opinion spoken in a way which invites discussion, so that there will be a total of seven criterion (see appendix). This should make the examination more difficult and a more valid measurement of their skills. I am also considering assigning positions to the class to ensure a variety of perspectives and a more interesting discussion.

In addition, I might not have the overhead in front of the class which allowed them to see the progress of their grade during the examination. I found that this made them speak to the grade instead of speaking to the class, so that they spoke until they saw all of the categories checked off. If they did not receive the grade they wanted during their first turn, they could try to fulfill the criteria in a subsequent turn. Therefore, the students who needed two or even three attempts to complete the criteria received the same grade as the students who accomplished the task on the first turn.

In the end. I believe this to be a useful public speaking final examination in that it more accurately tests their speaking skills

than does a multiple-choice test. It was also fun for the students and gave them an opportunity to hone their research skills. However, it does require some safe-guards against making it too easy for them. I welcome any new ideas or responses from other public speaking teachers.

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Student	New Information	Evidence	Citation	Eye Contact	One Clear Point	Transition	Invites Response